

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Today I am asking you to restore funding in the Department of Social Services budget for Independent Living Centers in Connecticut. The Governor's budget would eliminate state funding of \$679,911 in FY 2010 and \$689,430 in FY 2011. This funding is needed to fund vital services for community living, which the Independent Living Centers are providing in Connecticut.

My daughter with severe autism lives today in the community partly because of services she received from an Independent Living Center. Staff from the Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut (DNEC) attended Planning and Placement Team meetings, worked with service agencies, and provided social opportunities for my daughter. Because of the importance of the work done by DNEC, I am now a member of the DNEC board.

Last year DNEC served 176 consumers of all ages and all disabilities. 700 information and referrals alone were made in 2008. The DNEC share of the state funding cut of approximately \$150,000 means a reduction in one and half staff ^{people} hours and that DNEC would not be able to service almost a quarter of the consumers that were helped in 2008 and would respond to 100 less requests for information and referral. Not only would families like mine not have access to an advocate at a school PPT but towns and businesses would also potentially lose a resource for ADA adaptation and sign language interpreters.

An argument for the cut in state spending is the increase in federal funds for Independent Living Centers in the recently passed Economic Recovery bill. These funds will not compensate for the state funds currently received by DNEC. Further, the economic downturn will likely put more individuals with disabilities at risk for job loss and homelessness. The staff at DNEC can help prevent costly nursing home placements for these individuals. More funding, not less, is needed for independent living centers in these difficult economic times.

The work of the DNEC and the other independent living centers is also not easily duplicated by the area agencies on aging. DNEC works in close cooperation with the local AAA but brings much needed knowledge of disability issues, in particular for the deaf and hard of hearing and those with mental health issues

It is tempting in difficult economic times to characterize the staff of agencies such as DNEC as a luxury. Yet I remind you that individuals like my daughter live in this world and need support beyond that which their families can provide. Community living has been shown to be the most cost effective solution. But community living cannot happen without knowledge. Agencies like DNEC and the other Independent Living Centers in Connecticut have that knowledge and in the next few years will need adequate funding to serve the consumers needing their expertise. That is why I ask you to restore the state funding which can be leveraged in combination with the additional federal funding to directly serve individuals with disabilities. If the Congress felt this was a priority for economic stimulus, then all the more reason for Connecticut to view the state funding as additional stimulus for Connecticut.

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